

Alien furball starts off a cult following



ALF. Channel Seven, Monday 7.30pm.

What do you get when you cross a kangaroo with an aardvark? The same as you get when you cross kid humor with adult — Alf.

Channel Seven unveils its off-beat new series about an alien furball on Monday night — in the hope that wise-cracking, beer-drinking Alf becomes the stuff ratings are made of.

When Alf landed at the all-American home of television's Tanner family after his planet was blown apart, he set off a cult-following among American viewers aged five to 90.

His appeal stems partly from his being a wierd but cute hairy thing whose conversation zaps from lovable one-liners to remarks about how good the cat would taste.

Created by Paul Fusco and Tom Patchett — of Muppet movies and the Children's Television Workshop — Alf is a dwarf-sized item with an adult voice and a wry way of looking at the absurdities of life.

Though he is occasionally a little too street-wise for something just landed, he is a winner, even for the cast, who treat him as if real — at least in public.

Anne Schedeen, who plays Kate Tanner, the mother of two who agrees to hide the space traveller from the authorities, gave this writer a full assessment of the alien life form's character while denying he is from anywhere but Melmac.

"There is an awful rumor going around that Alf is a puppet," said Schedeen, not giving an inch when asked who did Alf's voice.

"Sometimes we wish he was a puppet, then we could put him away at the end of a show.

"No, he's from Melmac and you have to remind yourself he is an alien. Off-screen he's bad mannered, intrusive and really full of himself — especially now the show's doing well here in America and he's a star.

"He has a number of personal bad habits, a bit of a drinking problem and he coughs up furballs all the time.

"He was a male model on Melmac. I'm not saying he's a total jerk, he has good qualities, too. He dances very well."

Andrea Elson, who plays Lynn Tanner, 16, on the show, was almost as protective of Alf's identity in a phone conversation last week.

"He's very easy to act with — he's the same off camera as he is on set," said the lovely New Yorker.

"He and Lynn have a sister-brother relationship. She's always helping him out of trouble and she takes him on a blind date

with a blind woman in one episode."

Set almost entirely in the Tanner household, the show breaks new family comedy ground by showing people shaving, getting in the shower — discreetly of course — and in Andrea's case, wearing braces on teeth.

"Kids wear braces," said Andrea, who, for the record, got them off for her 18th birthday this month. "I get a lot of letters from kids saying 'thanks' for that."

The cast is now shooting its second 22-episode block of the series, after a year of solid work on the 25 episodes Brisbane is about to see.

Schedeen is confident the Australian public will like Alf's originality: "I don't think it is like anything else — it's funny, silly and hip all at once," she said. "I really hardly call it a family comedy — we don't have any families like this one as far as I can work out." — **Meredith Chaplin.**



ABOVE LEFT: Alf shocks the Tanner family at the table. ABOVE: The Tanner family pose with guest, alien Alf.

Lovable Alf is a winner

BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Anne Schedeen, Benji Gregory, Andrea Elson, Max Wright with Alf.

